

Havre starts Northern Tier microwave radio

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Hill County Sheriff Don Brostrom (from left) talks to Lewis and Clark County Sheriff Leo Dutton in Helena this morning using a hand-held radio as Montana Highway Patrol Capt. Brad Sangray, Glacier County Sheriff Wayne Dusterhoff, Blaine County Sheriff Glenn Huestis and Phillips County Sheriff Tom Miller listen during a test of the Interoperability Montana system.

A short conversation between the Hill County and Lewis and Clark County sheriffs this morning started a new era in communication for the Hi-Line and the state. Cascade County Sheriff Leo Dutton talked to Hill County Sheriff Don Brostrom for the first time using the Interoperability Montana microwave communication system — talking over a hand-held radio unit.

"Make sure they know I'm in Helena and not outside in the parking lot," Dutton said

over the radio. The Hill County Detention Center houses the first trunk in Montana outside of Lewis and Clark County to go on line, using microwave relays to allow law enforcement and emergency personnel to communicate using hand-held radios. Once the system is complete, emergency and law enforcement personnel will be able to communicate virtually anywhere in the state using a hand-held radio.

Lewis and Clark County Commissioner Ed Tinsley used the system to talk to Hill County Commissioner Mike Anderson. "This is a proud day for you up there ...," Tinsley said. "Keep in mind that you were the first." Anderson replied that the investment in the system — planning and development has been under way for more than four years — has paid off. The county has spent a lot of time and a lot of money on the project, he told Tinsley. "This makes it all worthwhile," Anderson said.

Funding has primarily come from U. S. Department of Homeland Security grants and the state Legislature to create the Interoperability Montana network. Once completed, most of the state will be networked to allow instant communication. The system will allow instant communication between local agencies as well, with the local sheriff's office, local police, local firefighters and volunteer fire departments and other public agencies set up to use the radio system.

The system will be programmable to allow groups to interact depending on the situation — in a disaster south of Rudyard, for example, representatives of the Hill County Sheriff's Office, the Rudyard Volunteer Fire Department, Havre Fire Department EMTs and any other necessary agencies could be set to communicate instantly. Once all systems are set in the

state, Havre and Hill County representatives will be able to communicate with radios anywhere a microwave relay provides access.

Brostrom said after the test of the system that the next step will be to finish "fleet mapping," setting up exactly what agencies will be set up to use the system. That will be tested in the next week, with setting up the actual systems starting early in November, he said. Microwave systems have been set in place that will allow instant communication between Hill, Blaine, Phillips and Liberty counties once those systems have gone on line, he said. For more information, see Wednesday's edition of the *Havre Daily News*.